

THE ULTIMATE HOMONYM GROUP

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Two or more words spelled differently but pronounced the same are called homonyms by logologists. Today's linguistics appears to have no name for such words - homonyms, homophones, and homographs may or even must all be spelled and sounded alike.

Exemplifying logological homonyms at their best are the word groups RIGHT, RITE, WRIGHT, and RITE; MAIN, MAINE, MANE, and MESNE; and RHODE (as in "Rhode Island"), ROAD, RODE, ROED, and ROWED. Larger homonym groups exist (the group including AIR and HEIR, for instance), but these invariably include aesthetically unattractive words or names. Even if we accept the objectionable members of the larger groups, no such group includes more than 10 or 12 words and/or names.

To overcome this severe limitation, the dedicated homonymist turns to letter homonym groups: letters and letter combinations representing one specific sound. In this realm, much larger homonym groups are possible. The largest such group heretofore identified is the group consisting of representations of the final vowel sound in WORDPLAY. According to a note in the May 1979 Colloquy in *Word Ways*, Richard Lederer has found 34 ways in which that sound is represented in English.

I have decided to transfer the problem to a higher dimension. Following is a list of 84 different ways in which the sound of the long E, exemplified by the E in EQUAL, is represented in English words and names:

A bologna (buh-low-nee)	EE- knee-worn
AE Caesar	EH rehbok
AGH shillelagh (shi-lay-lee)	EI weird
AH shillalah (shi-lay-lee)	ElGH Leigh
AL Dalziel (Dee-ell)	EIP receipt
AOI Aoife (Ee-feh)	EL Belvoir (Beaver)
AOIGHI Laoighis (Leash)	EO people
AY cay	ES demesne (di-mean)
E tedium	EW PoTe-Carew (Poe-ole-Kay-rey)
E- lozenge-shaped	EY valley
E' we've	EY- kidney-leaved
E. E. Rockaway	EYE keyed
EA plead	HAE Rhaetian
EA- tea-scented	HE rheostat
EAGH Killyleagh	HE' she'll
EAU Beauchamp (Beecham)	HEA wheat
EE freedom	HEE wheel

HEI Rheims	KI ski (shee)
HEY dinghey	KIE skied (sheed)
HI ghizite	OE phoebe
HIE dinghies	OEI onomatopoeia
HOE diarrhoea	OI chamoix (sham-meez)
HY dinghy	OLS chamois (sham-mee)
HY- bushy-tailed	OISE chamoised (sham-meed)
I police	OUGH Colclough (Coke-ley)
I- quasi-artistic	OY buoy (boo-ee)
IA Virginia (Vir-gin-ny)	U Llanrug (Lann-reeg)
IE brief	UAY quay (kee)
IEH Diehlstadt	UE Portuguese
IEU Nieuwe Maas (Nee-veh Mahss)	UEE marquee (mar-kee)
IG chignon	UI quiche (keesh)
IGH Denbigh	UIS marquis (mar-kee)
IGHT Kirkcudbright (Cur-coo-bree)	UIT pour acquit (poor ah-kee)
IH ihleite	UY guyot (ghee-owe)
Il Iizuka	Y roomy
IJ Ljubija (Lyoo-bee-a)	Y- lily-tongued
ILL tortilla	YE gramarye
IS debris	YY Krasnyy Sulin
IT esprit	- V-grooved
IX Grand Prix	. D.C.
IY Oktyabr'skiy	' t's
JÖ sjömil (shee-meel)	(---) Zs

My choice of the long E sound was dictated by two facts: (a) E is the most frequent letter in English words, maximizing my chance of achieving a remarkably long word list; and (b) the long sound of E is a sharply-defined one about which the various collegiate dictionaries are generally in agreement, making it possible for me to determine authoritatively whether or not a potential word or name qualified for inclusion in my list.

Three guidelines governed my choice of words and names. First, I resolved to permit only "dictionary" terms to enter my list, excluding all coined words. Second, I decided to give preference to words and names having only one correct pronunciation, but to accept terms with alternate pronunciations (ones altering the long E sound) when no single-sound term seemed to be available. Third, in true logological fashion, I decided to be opportunistic and to include in the spelling of the long E sound all letters, punctuation marks, and diacritical marks placed between the two sounds flanking the long E sound; or, if that sound was the initial or final sound of a word, to include in it all symbols not included in the sound adjacent to the long E sound. To give a simple illustration, the P in RECEIPT is silent; therefore, I attached it to the EI, representing the long E in RECEIPT by means of the letter combination EIP. My decision was not without precedent - Richard Lederer had employed the same tactic in his homonymic adventures in the November 1978 issue of **Word Ways**.

A group of 84 letter homonyms is nice - but a group of 100 would be even nicer. I therefore invite readers to try finding

another 16 representations of the long E sound. For starters, I suggest finding words and names in which the long E is represented by the letter combinations EAH, EOI, HAY, UAI, and YI. It is not too difficult to think of other potential letter combinations. In the November 1978 *Word Ways*, Richard Lederer presented the letter combination OAGHAI, as in Dún Laoghaire, an Irish seaport near Dublin. I have been unable to confirm the claimed pronunciation, either in Lederer's sources or anywhere else. Similarly, he presented the combination II, as in genii, but dictionaries agree that the two Is belong to two different syllables.

Various words and word groups in my list merit comment or explanation. E. ROCKAWAY is an abbreviation for EAST ROCKAWAY New York. The abbreviated form appears on the map of New York in the 1961 edition of *Hammond's Ambassador World Atlas*, and, no doubt, in a good many other atlases. DIEHLSTADT sounds like a city in Germany, but is not - it's a town in southeastern Missouri, not far from Cairo, Illinois. DINGHY is an unexceptionable word, considered by itself, but the word list also includes the variant DINGHEY and the plural DINGHIES. Since complete diversification is an aesthetic ideal, I would replace the word with MYRRHY (in Webster's Second Edition). That dictionary does not give terminal Ys the long E sound, as all more recent dictionaries do. Unfortunately, no more recent dictionary seems to include the word MYRRHY, so its current pronunciation must be inferred analogically. Rather than quarrel with purists, I left DINGHY in my list. VIRGINIA is pronounced as indicated in the list in the song title "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny" - a song the lyrics to which, also including the name VIRGINNY, appear in *500 Songs That Made the All Time Hit Parade*, compiled by Lyle Kenyon Engel (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), and, undoubtedly, in many other reference books. It is my contention that the dialectal or affectionate pronunciation VIRGINNY for the name VIRGINIA preceded the appearance of VIRGINNY in print, and that the spelling VIRGINNY was an attempt to represent an already existing pronunciation in writing. Therefore, VIRGINNY, including the long E sound, was originally a pronunciation of VIRGINIA, in the same way that BOLONEY is a pronunciation of the word BOLOGNA. I have found no discussion of the subject, either one way or the other, anywhere. Readers who disagree with me are free to delete the letter combination IA from their copy of my list - as they may do with anything to which they take exception - or to try replacing VIRGINIA with some other word pure as the driven snow. In my defense, I point out that VIRGINNY as a nickname or spelling of VIRGINIA does not appear in any of my slang dictionaries, in any of Mencken's books on the American language, in Mitford M. Mathews' *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles*, or anywhere else, so far as I know. This absence of VIRGINNY from sources that ought to include it supports my contention that it is only a pronunciation, not an existing word - a pronunciation of VIRGINIA.

The names BEAUCHAMP, BELVOIR, POLE-CAREW, and COLCLOUGH are ones current among the English nobility and gentry. My source

for them is a list of such names given on pages 211-12 of the revised edition of The Modern Word Finder by Paul D. Hugon (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1934). Since the source is an out-of-the-way one, I tried to corroborate its pronunciation. I found BEAUCHAMP in Webster's Biographical Dictionary and BELVOIR (as part of BELVOIR CASTLE) in The New Century Cyclopedia of Names. These corroborations permitted me to infer, by way of extrapolation, that COLCLOUGH and POLE-CAREW are also legitimate vehicles for the long E sound. I did find COLCLOUGH in A Dictionary of English and Welsh Surnames with Special American Instances by Charles Wareing Bardsley (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1967), but that source does not include pronunciations. It does include a variant spelling of the name - COLECROUGH. I would be interested in learning how that variant is pronounced, even though its potential for becoming the 85th member of the list in this article is minimal. As for the name POLE-CAREW, I find it nowhere else. Perhaps a British reader can provide the needed corroborations for COLCLOUGH and POLE-CAREW.

In the case of SKI and SKIED, my list uses the British pronunciations of those words (as a sop to the homeland of our language, of course). In some English words - SURELY, SUGAR, SUMAC, MAN-SION, CENSURE, NAUSEOUS, COMPULSION, TORSION, ISSUE, FISSURE, MISSION, and others - the letter S, either by itself or when doubled, has the sound customarily associated with the digraph SH. Since SK is no sort of digraph and is not generally pronounced the way SH is, it is reasonable to infer that the SH sound in the British pronunciations of SKI and SKIED belongs entirely to their initial Ss. It follows that the K in these words is a silent letter, permitting me to attach it to the immediately following vowel or vowels, for inclusion in my list of long E representations.

This argument paves the way for including SHE'LL and BUSHY-TAILED in my list. As Webster's Second Edition points out (see page li of the preliminary matter), the sound customarily represented by the digraph SH is a simple or pure sound, not a combination of the sounds of S and H. Extending the argument used to justify inclusion of the words SKI and SKIED in my list, it follows that what the H in SH does is to cause the S preceding it to be pronounced as it is pronounced in words such as SUGAR and SURELY. Since the sound of the H is not part of the resulting S sound, the letter H is silent, allowing me to attach the H to the immediately following vowel, with consequences fortuitously beneficial for my list.

With the exceptions already discussed, many of the words and names in my list are found in the various collegiate dictionaries. All of the words and some of the names are found in Webster's Second Edition, Webster's Third Edition, and/or the Random House Unabridged. All of the geographic names are found either in Webster's New Geographical Dictionary or in The Columbia Lippincott Gazetteer of the World. The more comprehensive Times Index-Gazetteer of the World is of no use because it does not include pronunciations. Neither are the latter included in any atlas, no matter

how large.

I am especially pleased with the last four entries in my list, which demonstrate that the long E sound can be represented without using letters of the alphabet - by punctuation marks, or by nothing at all. The three punctuation marks included in the list - the hyphen, the apostrophe, and the period - are those three appearing most frequently in English words. Other punctuation marks also sometimes appear in English words - the inverted comma in some words of Arabic origin, for example. However, the mathematical probability of finding such punctuation marks associated with the long E sound is vanishingly small. I am, of course, open to suggestions on that score.

Complementing the search for the ultimate homonym group is one for the ultimate heteronym or heterograph group. Here, one particular letter or letter group has a variety of pronunciations in different words and names. It is difficult to generate enthusiasm for this search because the ultimate heteronym group is undoubtedly a vocalic, not a consonantal, one. Unfortunately, vowel pronunciations tend to shade almost imperceptibly one into another, and there is little agreement among dictionaries how a particular vowel in a particular word is to be pronounced. It is, therefore, almost necessary to limit the search to the ultimate consonantal heteronym group. As a candidate for that honor, I advance the following group of eleven words, pronouncing the letter X in eleven different ways:

EKS as in X-RAY
GZ as in EXIST
GZH as in LUXURIOUS
H as in XERES
K as in EXCEPT
KRIS as in XMAS

KS as in SEX
KSH as in ANXIOUS
SH as in XERES
Z as in XYLOPHONE
--- as in FAUX PAS

The word XERES, in Webster's Second Edition, is an alternate name for sherry wine and has three pronunciations, two of which are included in the foregoing list. In words such as EXCEPT, EXCELLENT, and EXCEED, the sibilant portion of the usual X sound has fused with the sound of the C immediately following, leaving the K portion of the X sound as the only sound of the letter X. Putting the matter another way, the sibilant sound in these words is fully represented by the C in each of them, leaving the letter X only with the K sound. This interpretation is another illustration of logological opportunism at work.

Readers are invited to augment the X heteronym group, or to find some other one that is larger.